Ziegler Apologizes to Washington Post on Watergate

5/2/73

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 1 — Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secreary, apologized to The Washington Post today for his earlier criticisms of the newspaper's coverage of the Watergate case.

Mr. Ziegler's apology to The Post and to its investigative reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who have made a number of important disclosures about the Watergate case, came in response to a question.

Several times in the last two weeks, Mr. Ziegler had refused to apologize when asked similar suestions about his statements last October accusing The Post and its reporters of "shabby journalism" and "a blatant effort at character assassination."

"Mistakes were made during this period," Mr. Ziegler said today of the 18 months since the Watergate case first broke. "I was overenthusiastic."

His comments about The Post, the press secretary continued, were "an overstatement . . . particularly if you look at it in theh context of developments that have taken place." He said that Mr. Bernstein and Mr. Woodward had vigorously pursued the story, and deserved the credit they were receiving.

"When we're wrong, we're wrong," Mr. Ziegler concluded, "and I would have to say I was in that case and other cases."

In New York, Mrs. Katharine Graham, publisher of The Post, said today she accepted the apology by Mr. Ziegler.

"We appreciate it and accept it with pleasure," Mrs. Graham said, adding that "the Administration was trying to undermine the credibility of the press for the last 10 months."

Mrs. Graham was in New York to address the Society of the Silurians.

Following is a transcript of Mr. Ziegler's exchange with reporters about The Post:

Q. Ron, a question in view of the President's comments when he came out and said a few words to the press last evening. Are you ready to apologize to The Washington Post for your comments of last October?

Mr. Ziegler: I don't have the problem of the press giving me hell because that happens on a relatively frequent basis. I think we would all have to say, and I would be, I think, remiss if I did not say that mistakes were made during this period in terms of comments that were made, perhaps. I would say that I was overenthusiastic at the time in my comments about The Post, particularly if you look at it in the context of the developments that have taken place.

A press secretary, in this job, has to attempt to reflect the Presidency and the White House. He also finds himself speaking on his own from time to time, as I was doing on that occasion. It was an overstatement, I believe.

In thinking of it at this pointa in time, yes, I would apoligize to The Post, and I would apologize to Mr. Woodward and Mr. Bernstein.

Now, having said that, I don't want to say that I agree with everything they write, and everything they have written. I think that would be a mistake, too. But they have vigrously pursued this story and they deserve the credit and are receiving the credit for it.

When we're wrong, we're wrong, and I would have to say I was in that case and other cases.